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THE EVOLUTION OF THE CIA OPERATIONS CENTER

INTRODUCTION

The CIA Operations Center at the opening of the 1970's is the product of more than two decades of growth from very modest beginnings. It continues to change and develop in response to changing needs and circumstances both within the Agency and elsewhere in the government. Its place and function within the structure of the Agency have ^{now} become fairly well defined, however, and future modifications in organization and methods of operation are likely to be relatively minor when compared to those of ^{its} ~~earlier~~ formative years. This ~~paper~~ ^{summary} will attempt to trace the development of the Center and its ~~predecessors~~ predecessors, with particular attention to events and circumstances surrounding major changes in its organization and functions.

Before looking into the past, a brief ~~glance~~ glance at the Operations Center as it stands at the end of 1969 might be useful.

The prime purpose of the ^{Center since its} ~~earliest antecedents of the Center~~ ^{has been} ~~was~~ to serve as an alerting mechanism, and this remains true of the ~~present Operations Center~~. In this capacity, the Center monitors events throughout the world by every available means for 24 hours of every day of the year. The importance of this activity is indicated by the simple fact that "normal" working hours account for less than one-quarter of the total hours of the week. For more than three-quarters of the time, therefore, it is the responsibility of the Operations Center, through the Watch Office, to spot important happenings and take appropriate action. There is almost certainly no other ~~office~~ office in

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of OCI

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The Operations Center further facilitates liaison ~~with other~~
~~agencies~~ and coordination by furnishing trained and experienced
13 personnel ~~for~~ full-time positions in the White House and the
4 National Military Command Center. Seventeen full-time Operations
Center personnel are now required to fill these positions.

The Operations Center provides facilities and support for
"Task Forces" that may be set up to deal with important and fast-
breaking situations that require a cooperative effort by various
elements of OCI, the Intelligence Directorate, and other CIA com-
ponents. These facilities include working space, telephones and
other communications services, maps, and the Center's capability
for immediate screening and dissemination of incoming traffic.
These services are, of course, constantly available, and provide
a mechanism for coordinating joint efforts, whether or not a special
task force is formed. The Center also ~~maintains~~ maintains a Situation
Room where current information on situations of immediate interest
is kept available in convenient form for reference.

In addition to these substantive services, the Operations
Center performs a host of miscellaneous ~~tasks~~ tasks. It can
locate principal officers of the Agency and other high government
officials at any time. It can call for emergency transportation or
courier service, and it can summon people to cope with such urgent
emergencies as safes that refuse to lock or plumbing that is flooding
a rest room floor.

In order to carry out its mission, the Operations Center
has an impressive array of equipment. In addition to numerous con-
ventional telephone lines, the Center has access to secure voice

systems through which it can talk across the hall or around the world. Direct circuits from the Signal Center terminate in a battery of teleprinters that produce an unceasing flow of cable traffic from CIA, State Department, and military installations abroad and in the United States. Another battery of printers brings in the output of three major press services and the Foreign Broadcast Information Service. Long Distance Xerography (LDX) permits transmission of graphic material ^{between} ~~among~~ terminals in the Operations Center, the White House, the State Department, ^{and, through relays, the NSA and NMCC.} ~~the~~ the Pentagon, Radio connects the Center with cars of the Agency motor pool and provides constant contact with officials and couriers in transit. A radio ~~teletype~~ paging system also permits officials to be contacted when they are away from a telephone or a car radio. The CIA terminal of the teletype net maintained by the Office of Emergency Preparedness, by which ~~such~~ messages can be flashed to government agencies in the event of an emergency, ^{also} is housed in the Operations Center.

People on duty around the clock include senior intelligence duty officers, watch officers, typists, communications personnel, disseminators, couriers, and printers. While not all of these people are under the direct control of the Operations Center, the Center ^{assists in} ~~also assists in~~ coordinating their efforts in facilitating the production of timely and accurate finished intelligence and performing a variety of other services in support of CIA activities.

A brief sketch of some major turning points in the evolution of the Center may help orient the reader before he plunges into a detailed account.

The Operations Center reached its present stage of complexity and efficiency through a ~~constant~~ process of evolution from the most humble ~~beginnings~~ origin. With the creation of the Central Intelligence Group at the beginning of 1946, an officer was simply detailed to spend the night in the office of the Director to answer the telephones, receive messages, and alert officials as necessary. Since the duty officer was concerned principally with handling current intelligence, and since the reporting of current intelligence was then the responsibility of the Office of Reports and Estimates, the duty officer function was ~~moved~~ moved into that office, organizationally and physically, in August 1948. By that time, it had also become apparent that the system under which the duty rotated among officers who served only at long intervals was unsatisfactory.

The earliest true ancestor of the present Operations Center was the group of permanent duty officers set up within ORE at that time. Since these duty officers ~~covered~~ covered only non-working hours, many of the early duty officers were college students in the Washington area who could work at night and go to school during the day. *Many of* ~~In many cases~~ these men remained with the Agency after completing their education and some of them continue to occupy various responsible positions.]

This duty officer system continued to function adequately for the next couple of years. During this time, the whole question of current intelligence reporting was under constant review--not to say dispute--within the Agency and throughout the intelligence community. Since the duty officers occupied front-line positions in the handling of current intelligence, their fate was closely tied in with the

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whole problem of current intelligence reporting. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~

Thus the duty officers were swept up in the series of rapid

organizational and functional changes that began in November 1950, *in the wake of the out break of the Korean War and the subsequent entry of the Chinese into the war.*

At that time, the Office of Reports and Estimates spawned the Office of National Estimates and the Office of Special Services, ~~was~~

~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Since ONE retained--briefly--the responsibility for current intelligence reporting, the duty officers came under its

jurisdiction at this point. OSS was intended to concern itself solely with reporting based on an arrangement that soon

proved unsatisfactory. In January 1951, therefore, the Office of Current Intelligence was formed to combine the ~~XXXXXX~~ ^{ateral} ~~control~~

current intelligence reporting of ONE and reporting of

OSS. [Details of these events are covered in the History of OCI.

Their significance for the duty officer system lay in the rapid shift of authority from ORE to ONE to OCI, the acquisition of important new responsibilities, and a change in name.]

The new responsibilities arose from the creation of a new daily publication, then called the Current Intelligence Bulletin, that first appeared at the end of February 1951. Because of the increased interest in current intelligence, the problem of maintaining

to Watch timeliness became acute. OCI therefore set up a Watch Office, manned *Officers* and IDO by the former duty officers, and gave it the additional responsibility

of monitoring the situations reported in the Bulletin in order to

note new developments that might require changes in the publication *during off-duty hours*

To help discharge this responsibility, an intelligence duty officer

drawn from a roster of analysts was on duty each night. The Watch

*11 Feb 1951
Duty of new
current from
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to OCI*

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substantive changes themselves in the publication. If they noted a development that appeared to warrant a change, they were to call in the appropriate analyst and other assistance in order to do the necessary rewriting. In practice, of course, events did not always conform to the publication schedule, and it was not a rare occurrence, when deadlines were pressing.

for night duty officers to make ~~the~~ necessary changes after a hasty telephone conference with the analyst concerned, ~~in order to meet~~ ~~the~~ ~~deadlines~~. The primary mission of the Watch Office--to ~~monitor~~ incoming traffic and alert appropriate officials when necessary--remained unchanged. ~~From~~ the inauguration of the Current (later Central) Intelligence Bulletin in early 1951, however, ~~the~~ ~~the~~ the Watch Office has devoted an increasing amount of time to problems connected with the production of a variety of intelligence publications.

Office The Watch ~~continued~~ along these lines for the next ~~two~~ ^{three} years.

In February 1954, the Watch came under the control of the Secretariat of the newly-formed of OCI. The intelligence duty officer was eliminated at that time, and the alerting responsibility entirely devolved ~~on~~ on the watch officers. ~~Each~~ Each of the two night shifts was manned by two watch officers, ~~and~~ and the Secretariat was given the responsibility for screening incoming traffic during working hours and taking proper priority action when required. This system remained essentially in effect until 1958.

Measures taken to streamline the operations of OCI during 1958 had a direct bearing on the evolution of the Operations Center.

In January of that year the Current Intelligence Bulletin became the

Central Intelligence Bulletin, the change signifying its conversion

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Back to
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from a CIA publication into a coordinated product of the intelligence community. The new status of the Bulletin and the resulting review of procedures involved in its production eventually had a considerable effect on the transition of the Watch Office into the present Operations Center. In mid-1958 ~~new system was put into operation~~ an effort was

made

to consolidate and coordinate various activities of OCI. Since a key aspect of the system was the creation of ^{group of} a new post known as

To SIDO system

~~the~~ Senior Intelligence Duty Officer, the system as a whole was referred to as the SIDO system. Initially, the ~~XXXXXX~~ SIDO's filled six posts as described in detail in the following History. For the development of the Watch Office, the most significant ~~of these posts~~ were the two night duty officers. Each of these served an eight-hour tour to cover the hours from 1600 on one day until 0800 the following day as well as certain week-end periods. Each of the SIDO's served in each of the six posts for a period of three weeks at a time.

^{about} Thus one-third of the time of each SIDO was spent as a night intelligence duty officer. This restored the former practice of having an intelligence duty officer present in the Watch Office during non-working hours but with the advantage that the post was now filled by men who stood the duty repeatedly rather than at long intervals and who thus remained familiar with procedures and problems. A further marked advantage was that the posts filled by SIDO's during normal working hours also kept them abreast of developments in all situations of current interest rather than confining them to particular areas as had been the case with the desk analysts who had ~~formerly~~ ^{served as night duty} ~~made up the night duty~~ *intelligence duty officers.*

This "rotating" SIDO system worked quite well for the next
-- Though constant rotation of working hours was hard on
couple of years. Shortly after the system was inaugurated, the incumbent
SIDOs.

To SIDO Center various activities in which the SIDO's were involved were con-
solidated into the "SIDO Center" which was another major step
in the direction of the present Operations Center. During this
period, ~~moreover~~, the amount of work done during the night shifts
increased enormously. This was due to a number of factors: there
was a progressive increase in the number of memorandums and other
irregular publications that had to be produced at night for
morning delivery, there was an increased emphasis on timeliness
of periodical publications, there was an increased emphasis on
rapid response by the U. S. Government to events abroad, and
there was an increased number of situations such as the accelerating
Soviet space and missile effort that required ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ the immediate
attention of U. S. officials.

As a result of this proliferation of nighttime activity, the
SIDO who was due to be relieved at midnight often found himself so
deeply involved in half a dozen problems that he had no time to brief
his successor and turn over his duties. Unfortunately, but under-
standably under these circumstances, there was a certain lapse of
continuity on occasion. Consequently, in reviewing possible modi-
fications in procedures with the advent of the Kennedy administration,
it was decided to institute a 16-hour duty tour for the night SIDO
in order to provide unbroken continuity from the end of one business
day to the opening of another. This was put into effect in mid-
January 1961, about one week before the inauguration of President
Kennedy. At the same time, the night duty was separated from the other
SIDO posts and became the ~~night duty~~ *night duty*

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SIDO posts reverted to permanent incumbents. The daytime
non-rotating SIDO posts

The all-night duty tour was entered upon with some qualms but has remained ~~has remained~~ essentially unchanged ever since. Meanwhile the burdens of the night operation increased even more rapidly under the new administration. This was due in large part to the discovery by the new White House staff that they could call for a special paper or memorandum from the Agency at any hour of the day or night and on almost any subject and receive a prompt and ~~useful~~ response. These requests tended to originate ~~late~~ late in the day and much of the editing and production of the resulting papers was done under the supervision of the night SIDO. The ~~XXXXX~~ night operation gradually received additional personnel to relieve the pressure. There was already a typist on duty throughout the night by this time, and a night editor was eventually designated to relieve the SIDO of editorial and proof-reading chores that had been taking up much of his time and preventing proper attention to current incoming traffic. 25X1

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At that time, a large conference room across the hall from the Watch Office that had been very little used became a Cuban war room and housed the task forces that were soon working around the clock. This room eventually became the home of the Watch Office.

In September of 1961, the Watch Office was one of the first elements of the Agency to move to the new Headquarters building at Langley. The first few months in the new building produced many incidents that were more amusing than significant. Not at all amusing, however, were the conditions under which the Watch Office had to work for the next four years. In spite of the vast increase in the activities centering ^{on} around the Watch Office, it was granted ^{little} ~~no~~ more in the way of space and facilities in the new building than it had had in the old "tempo" in Foggy Bottom. It occupied, in fact, somewhat less floor space than previously. As in the past, only a major catastrophe could bring about the necessary improvements and even then these improvements were long in coming.

The crisis that resulted in the final transition from the old Watch Office/SIDO system to the present Operations Center was, of course, the "Cuban missile crisis" of the autumn of 1962. ^{INSERT} The crisis period itself was followed by a long, painful, and largely futile postmortem to find out ~~why~~ why we were not better informed on what the Russians had been up to. Despite the rather glaringly evident lack of a coordination between the clandestine and ~~overt~~ overt sides of the Agency in both the Bay of Pigs and missile crises, it was not until January 1965 that the decision was made to merge the SIDO Center and the clandestine services ^{no} operations center into the CIA Operations Center. From this time on, the Operations Center became the "single Agency 24-hour intelligence alert facility" responsible for "alerting the White House, DCI, DDCI, DDI, DDP, and other senior Agency officials to situations and developments requiring their immediate attention."

Many more months were to elapse^{however} before the Operations Center's facilities began to become equal to this task which had now been formally and explicitly recognized. Again the process was accelerated by ~~an acute~~ crisis--the events of April 1965 in the Dominican Republic. Again it became evident that a point of close and constant contact between the clandestine and overt sides of the Agency was necessary. ■ It had also become abundantly clear to even the most grudging administrator by this time that the Operations Center must have more space and better communications facilities if it were to continue to fulfill its responsibilities.

In October 1965, the Operations Center moved into its present quarters. Both space and facilities were now reasonably adequate for the performance of the Center's tasks. A further improvement that came about at the same time was the addition of the clandestine services duty officer to the permanent complement of the Center. Although this move had clearly been intended when the Operations Center was formed in January 1965, it was ~~not~~ only under the *further* impetus of the Dominican crisis that the clandestine services' reluctance was finally overcome.

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With the move into its present quarters the Operations Center ~~had~~ achieved ~~the form~~ essentially the form it now retains. Improvements continued to be made--the LDX was added in 1966^{for example}--but basically the Center had come of age.

As is evident from the foregoing brief sketch, the Operations Center as it exists today more or less "just grew." Each major turning point in its history came about as a result of ~~an acute~~ a crisis or near-disaster. Even in these circumstances, ~~many~~ ^{often} needed changes were made only after long delays. It would appear from these examples that the future development of the Operations Center

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will be smoother and the services it can render the Agency and the intelligence community more effective if foresight plays a larger part in future changes.

One readily apparent reason for ~~the~~ lack of foresight in the growth of the alerting mechanism has been the persistent practice of placing the watch function under the supervision and control of administrative personnel who have lacked both experience within the alerting mechanism itself and any substantive acquaintance with the intelligence reporting process that constitutes the main business of OCI. Throughout all the years of its existence, for example, no supervisor of the alert mechanism has ever visited the Watch Office during the night in a crisis period in order to observe at first hand the problems that are peculiar to the night operation. As an inevitable result, requests for space, facilities, or equipment ^{have} met with the usual bureaucratic negative response since the responsible officials had no basis on which to judge the validity of the requests. That disaster was repeatedly averted under these circumstances is due largely to the ability and dedication of the watch officers and other personnel associated ~~the~~ with the watch office.

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A final observation concerns the lack of recognition of the substantive role sometimes played by the Watch Office in the intelligence production process. At least since the creation of the old Current Intelligence Bulletin early in 1951, the Watch Office has not infrequently been forced to recapitulate the entire intelligence ~~XXXXXX~~ reporting process ~~XXXX~~ with its own resources. This occurs, as mentioned previously, when the timing of a new development is such that there is no time for the responsible analyst to be aroused, come into the office, study the evidence, ^{and} write or modify a piece which then requires editing, typing, and incorporation into the appropriate publication. [REDACTED] In these circumstances a choice must be made between ignoring the new development, delaying the publication, or preparing the new material by the watch officers [REDACTED] or SIDO. Never in its history, however, have the successive formal charters of the ~~XXXXXX~~ Watch Office recognized this situation. On the contrary, these charters have tacitly assumed that ~~XXXX~~ momentous events would not ~~XXXXX~~ become known during that interval of several hours from the time it is too late to call in an analyst until distribution of a publication. ~~IX~~ To the credit of Watch Officers, analysts, and SIDO's, this situation has been recognized in practice and has been circumvented by ^{prior} discussions between analysts and watch office personnel, writing of contingency pieces, and other ~~XXXXXX~~ informal devices. It should also be taken into account in the formal statement of ~~WAX~~ Operations Center functions.

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A typical night in The Watch Office

People who arrive at their offices every workday morning and leave in the afternoon tend to have an inaccurate notion of what goes on in the Watch Office during "off-duty" hours. There seems to be a general picture of watch officers lounging around a quiet room and occasionally rousing themselves from their lethargy to pick up a telephone or read a cable. After taking ~~xxx~~ a message or throwing the cable into its predestined slot, the man returns to his nap or Playboy. The truth is vastly different. Two thousand or more separate pieces of printed material may flow through the Watch Office in a single night. These are not simply "processed." A substantial ~~number~~ proportion must be at least scanned for information of possible immediate interest. Meanwhile the telephones are almost constantly busy. The Pentagon and NSA have always maintained large staffs on duty at night and in recent years even the Department of State has gradually expanded its after-hours capability. A constant round of consultations, queries, and exchanges of information goes on among these people. And not all the telephone calls are legitimate. One of the numerous little-known functions of the Watch Office is screening "crank calls" that come into the Agency switchboard. Quite often it is difficult at first to distinguish these from genuine calls since even the latter can sometimes be a bit bizarre. The switchboard operators are instructed, therefore, to [↑]switch such calls to the Watch Office for ~~screening~~ [↑]screening. Since many of the cranks are repeaters, the Watch Officers become well acquainted with a small group of eccentrics throughout the country who regularly offer the Agency the benefit of their advice on how to end the war in Vietnam, topple Castro, or solve other problems facing the United States.

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These routine duties are sufficient to occupy the full time of the night duty ~~person~~ staff. More often than not, another full-time job is provided by the expectedly unexpected. A few years ago, for example, on a night that was not too different from other nights, a Russian space venture of great interest and a Chinese domestic political development of almost equal interest both "broke" almost simultaneously a little after midnight in Washington. Within an hour, half a dozen scientific and technical types were gathered around a table in a room adjacent to the Watch Office reading yards of teletype copy, arguing about its import, and trying to write a coherent account of what was going on. A few feet away three or four Far Eastern experts were gathered around another table performing the same service for the Chinese situation. Secure telephone lines were kept busy with discussions of both situations with counterparts in other government agencies. Watch Officers were kept busy monitoring incoming traffic, ~~and~~ instantly conveying relevant items to the people concerned, answering phones, and trying to keep the two groups of analysts from interfering with each other and with the ~~working~~ necessary routine of the office.

④ ~~Since~~ Since this was a Thursday night, the OCI weekly publications were being printed and bound for distribution on Friday morning. As usual, a routine security check was made of the final product to see that ~~high~~ more highly classified material had not found its way into the secret-level publication. The copy provided for the security check was perfect. Almost inadvertently, however, someone flipped through another copy and turned up a page of sensitive material that had somehow been bound into the wrong publication. The only recourse ~~was~~

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^{publication}
was to go through the entire page by page. ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ In addition to continuing their ~~for~~ support for the two groups of analysts, whose activities were reaching a peak of intensity by this time, the Watch Office had ~~the~~ hastily ^{to} recruit a task force of printers, couriers, typists, and commo operators to go through 1200 copies of the secret publication and make certain they contained none of the forbidden material.

By 0630 ^{on} ~~that~~ Friday morning, both the ~~XXXXXX~~ daily Bulletin and the weeklies were ready for distribution. The Bulletin carried items on the Soviet space shot and the Chinese domestic political scene that were not only informative ^{and accurate} but syntactically and typographically correct, and the weekly contained only what it was supposed to contain. By the The first day ~~workers~~ ^{got} time ~~early~~ ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ to work, the Watch Office presented a picture of calm and order. Day workers who might ^{have seen} ~~see~~ a watch officer glancing through ^{his} morning paper ^{probably} envied him his "easy life."

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